



*Superintendent Denise Juneau believes we need to set an expectation that every Montana student will graduate from high school. In order for our young people to compete in the 21st Century global economy, a high school diploma is key. Nearly 2,000 Montana students drop out of school each year. We can do better.*

## What is Graduation Matters Montana?

Superintendent Juneau launched a statewide effort to ensure Montana's public schools graduate more students prepared for college and careers.

### Local Graduation Matters Initiatives

Superintendent Juneau supports the implementation of locally-designed Graduation Matters initiatives that engage schools, communities, businesses and families in a focused effort to increase the number of students who graduate prepared for college and careers.

Local Graduation Matters initiatives have already launched in Billings, Belgrade, Bozeman, Butte, Great Falls, Hamilton, Helena, Kalispell, Missoula and Townsend. This Fall, more than half of Montana high school students have a Graduation Matters initiative in their town.

### Student-Centered Policies

Oftentimes, adults plan and discuss educational policy, but rarely talk to the people who will be most directly affected by those plans and discussions: the students. To include student ideas and voices in state-level policies, Superintendent Juneau created the first-ever Superintendent's Student Advisory Board.

Forty students from thirty-one communities gathered to discuss ways to improve the state's graduation rate and to address school climate issues.

They reported that they seek relevant coursework and real-world experiences, clear and consistent rules, a positive school climate and meaningful relationships at their schools.

As a result of Student Advisory Board input, Superintendent Juneau launched an "I Pledge to Graduate" campaign to help students set their sights on graduation. Juneau's 2011-2012 Student Advisory Board will hold their first meeting in November, focusing on college and career-readiness.



### Objectives of Graduation Matters Montana:

1. Increase the rate of Montana students graduating from high school college- and career-ready.
2. Establish a support network between schools, businesses and community organizations for student success.
3. Create school-based and community-based opportunities for student success.



**2011 2012**  
Superintendent Denise Juneau

## Policy Changes

Superintendent Juneau proposed covering the cost of the **ACT for every high school junior** in the Office of Public Instruction's budget at the 2011 Legislature. Funding to cover the cost of the ACT for every junior has been secured through a seven-year grant under the GEAR UP program. This partnership between OPI and the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education will provide a complete picture of how well our K-12 public education system is preparing all students for life after high school and provide every Montana junior the opportunity to assess their college-readiness.

Superintendent Juneau recommended adoption of the **Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Math** to the Board of Public Education, and the BPE adopted these standards. The Montana Common Core Standards are higher and clearer than current state standards and will prepare our students for college and to compete in today's global economy. She also convened a task force to review Montana's **accreditation** standards to make them more performance-based and to provide school districts needed flexibility to focus on results.



During the 2011 Legislative Session, Superintendent Juneau championed bills to **raise the legal drop out age** from "age 16" to "age 18 or upon graduation" and to establish common definitions and procedures for anti-bullying policies for all school districts. Superintendent Juneau will continue to support legislation and administrative policies that set high expectations for students and create safe school climates.

## Relevant Coursework and Career Preparation

In Montana, all high school students take at least one career and technical education course, and over half take three or more. Discussions with students make it clear they desire classes that relate to real-world experiences, career preparation and include hands-on learning. Superintendent Juneau supports the expansion of **Big Sky Pathways**, a partnership with the Montana University System, that links students to career coursework paths so they earn college credits and explore careers while they are in high school.

Workforce projections by the U.S. Department of Labor show that by 2018, nine of the 10 fastest-growing occupations that require at least a bachelor's degree will also require significant scientific or mathematical training. Superintendent Juneau is convening education stakeholders and business partners to create a pipeline for students to be prepared for careers in **Science, Technology, Engineering and Math** through OPI's statewide STEM initiative.

Superintendent Juneau is also working with the Montana Department of Labor to expand **Jobs for Montana's Graduates** (JMG). JMG provides classroom instruction and work-based learning opportunities to students in grades seven through twelve and high school dropouts ages 16-18. Ninety-five percent of students who participate in JMG graduate from high school.

## I Pledge to Graduate Campaign

Research shows that students are more likely to reach a goal if they identify their own motivations when committing to meet it. Superintendent Juneau, in partnership with local school districts and the Student Advisory Board, is launching an "I Pledge to Graduate" campaign.

Students pledge to a significant adult that they will graduate and identify specific reasons why graduation is important to them. This high-profile campaign focuses statewide attention on Graduation Matters Montana, engages community and business partners, involves social networking and highlights student voices and ideas.

For more information on **Graduation Matters Montana** contact Deborah Halliday, Policy Advisor, Community Learning Partnerships, at 406-444-3559 or [dhalliday@mt.gov](mailto:dhalliday@mt.gov).